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Smarter Balanced Adopts Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines
*Policy will ensure next-generation assessments meet the needs of
English language learners and students with disabilities*

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The Governing States of the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](http://www.smarterbalanced.org) (Smarter Balanced) voted to approve the *Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* in advance of a large-scale Field Test of the assessment system in early 2014. The unanimous decision by the Consortium's Governing States represents an important milestone toward implementing assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards in the 2014-15 school year.

"Smarter Balanced member states are moving toward the on-time launch of the assessment system in spring 2015," said Deb Sigman, Smarter Balanced Executive Committee Co-Chair. "By adopting common universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations, states will be able to provide an assessment that allows all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, while ensuring that results are comparable across the Consortium."

Developed in collaboration with member states and nationally recognized experts, the *Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* will shape the delivery of online testing for all students, including those with visual, auditory, linguistic, or physical needs. The research-based policy outlines three categories of resources to ensure that the assessments meet the needs of all students. The categories further distinguish between embedded tools included in the testing platform and non-embedded tools.

1. A set of universal accessibility tools—such as a digital notepad and scratch paper—will be available to all students.
2. Designated supports—like a translated pop-up glossary—will be made available to students for whom a need has been identified by school personnel familiar with each student's needs and testing resources.
3. Accommodations will be available to students with a documented need noted in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. These tools include Braille and closed captioning, among others.

The development of the guidelines included feedback from states, advisory panels on English language learners and students with disabilities, and national organizations. The *Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* are available on the Smarter Balanced website: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SmarterBalanced_Guidelines_091113.pdf.

Chief state school officers approved the policy Tuesday in a public meeting at the fifth Smarter Balanced Collaboration Conference. The conference was held at the University of California, Los Angeles in partnership with the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, & Student Testing (CRESST). Earlier this year, Smarter Balanced announced the intent to establish an affiliation with CRESST after the conclusion of the federal grant in 2014. The meeting included welcoming remarks from UCLA Chancellor Gene Block, Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, dean of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, and Eva Baker, co-director of CRESST.



State education chiefs also voted to affirm that each member state will retain control of student-level data generated by the assessment system. A Consortium-wide student data privacy policy—consistent with this principle—will be developed for approval at a future meeting.

“The Smarter Balanced Assessment System includes stringent security protocols to protect test results,” said Joe Willhoft, Smarter Balanced Executive Director. “The decision today reaffirms that member states will continue to oversee student data, consistent with the protections established by federal and state laws and regulations.”

The approval of the *Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* represents the latest milestone toward the on-time launch of the assessments in the 2014-15 school year. Smarter Balanced has conducted tryouts of assessment items in a Pilot Test and small-scale trials in thousands of schools. Beginning in March 2014, a large-scale Field Test will be conducted across member states. In addition, networks of K-12 teachers and higher education faculty from each state are collaborating to evaluate assessment tools and professional development resources for an online Digital Library that will be available to educators next year.

In accordance with the Consortium’s state-led governance structure, the 23 Smarter Balanced Governing States each have a vote on major policy decisions through their chief state school officer or delegate. Governing States joined representatives from all of the Consortium’s 26 members—including state education chiefs, K-12 state leads, higher education leads, work group members, and contractors—for the conference.

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About Smarter Balanced

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium brings together states to create a common, innovative assessment system for mathematics and English language arts/literacy that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and helps prepare students for college and careers. The Consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven process to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. The Consortium’s projects are funded through a four-year, \$175 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, comprising 99 percent of activity resources, with the remaining support provided through generous contributions of charitable foundations. Membership is open to any interested U.S. state. For more information, please visit www.smarterbalanced.org.